



California Public Utilities Commission

505 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94102

News Release

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Media Contact: Terrie Prosper, 415.703.1366, news@cpuc.ca.gov

PUC ESTABLISHES DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROGRAM TO INCREASE RESPONSIVENESS AND ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION IN PROCEEDINGS

SAN FRANCISCO, August 25, 2005 - The California Public Utilities Commission (PUC) today formally established an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) program to increase responsiveness to disputing parties, encourage more active participation of all parties (regardless of an individual party's size or resources), save parties' time and resources, and allow the Commission to direct its decision-making resources to other important proceedings.

The program utilizes an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) as a neutral person to assist two or more other parties in resolving disputed issues. In complaint cases, parties who reach an agreement may generally withdraw the complaint without Commission action. In other proceedings (such as rate cases), the Commission must approve the parties' settlement to ensure that their agreement complies with applicable law, satisfies the public interest, and is enforceable. ADR includes one or more individual processes such as negotiation, fact-finding, mediation, and early evaluation of a case by a neutral person.

Parties participate in ADR on a voluntary basis. ADR is often preferable to litigation because, in addition to saving time, resources, and money, it potentially can produce outcomes that more closely address the parties' needs, as compared to the "winner-take-all" results that are typical of litigation.

The PUC has used ADR for many years, but the Resolution adopted today seeks to broaden its use by expanding the types of ADR available and the kinds of proceedings in which it may be applied.

Commissioner Geoffrey F. Brown, the lead Commissioner on this initiative, commended the ALJ Division and its Chief ALJ, Angela Minkin, for the Division's commitment to expedited proceedings. "It's been said the law moves with glacial swiftness. The ALJ Division has done an admirable job in putting the emphasis on swiftness, fairness, and avoiding the cold shoulder."

For more information on the PUC, please visit www.cpuc.ca.gov.

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